

EESC info

European Economic
and Social Committee

a bridge between Europe and organised civil society



EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

As I announced at the EESC plenary session last February, I want to insist on the need for EU citizens to use their democratic right and to vote in the European elections this June. The current crisis should not tempt us to abandon the European ideal of solidarity and social justice.

In the same spirit of reaffirming the principle of participation in the democratic life of the EU and in order to strengthen the voice of civil society in Europe, the EESC has adopted, at its last plenary session on 24 March, a new social, economic and environmental pact for Europe — 'A programme for Europe: proposals of civil society'.

This programme is a strategic, long-term document on the current political debate and the challenges ahead. It is meant to address the EU institutions with a set of concrete measures and initiatives needed to overcome the economic crisis and support sustainable growth in the years to come. We are calling on the other institutions, the Member States and stakeholders to ensure that the June elections discuss matters of European interest and not just national issues.

'A programme for Europe: proposals of civil society' has three fundamental objectives: a prospective objective, a political objective and an institutional objective.

The prospective objective reveals the Committee's soul in a global framework that reflects the consistency of its work. This programme permits the Committee's members, who represent civil society organisations in the European Union, to set out their views on the choices that Europe must make for a sustainable future in a world in crisis.

The Committee's political objective is to present what might be termed a civil society manifesto to the other institutions, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council in particular, in order to support their actions with a view to achieving Europe's shared goals.

Finally, the institutional objective is to place the ideas of the EESC at the heart of the debate on the challenges facing Europe in the coming years by proposing concrete measures to the institutions.

'A programme for Europe: proposals of civil society' will be submitted to the next European Parliament and the European Commission and I am convinced that it will be a very important contribution to the European current debate, in order to support common choices at European level to answer the urgent challenges for civil society.

Mario Sepi

EESC President

DIARY DATES

25 May 2009

Prague, Czech Republic:
Meeting and public hearing of
the Single Market Observatory
on 'Legislative obstacles to
the European single market
— Findings of the Czech civil
society'

28 May 2009

EESC: hearing on 'The EU,
Africa and China'

4–7 June 2009

European elections

4, 11, 18 and 25 June 2009

EESC: Literature lunches

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'Programme for Europe' unites MEPs, irrespective of political differences

In its plenary session in March, the EESC rose to the challenge of providing concrete and thorough strategic proposals for the problems facing the European Union. In what has already been hailed as a milestone event in the Committee's history, the members adopted the 38-page document 'A programme for Europe: proposals of civil society'. Through the 'Programme for Europe' the Committee has contributed significantly to the debate in advance of the June European elections.

'In this difficult period of crisis and at a time when the renewal of the institutions is approaching, this civil society manifesto indicates how we can make headway in all areas where the EU is active,' said EESC President Mario Sepi. 'The Committee is making the voice of civil society heard in the debate about the challenges facing Europe in the coming years.'

'If this excellent document was a party manifesto, I would join that party right away!', said Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, MEP in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), at the meeting held on 15 April between EESC President Mario Sepi and prominent MEPs; the meeting discussed the 'Programme for Europe' and the European political groups' respective programmes. Othmar Karas, Vice-Chairman of the European People's Party, pledged to send the 'Programme for Europe' to all front-line EPP candidates in the June elections. 'This will European-



President Sepi presenting 'A programme for Europe'

ise the upcoming EP elections, which have mostly been about national issues so far,' said Mr Karas.

In the same vein, Adrian Severin (PES, former Romanian Foreign Minister) underlined that citizens were the driving force behind the European project. He stressed the importance of the 'Programme for Europe' insofar as it shows concretely how European integration can answer people's needs. 'Now we have to find out what kind of Europe people want and how they want us to tackle the crisis. The answers to these questions will be given at the European elections.'

Monica Frassoni, Co-President of the European Greens, said that the 'political offer' was crucial to getting citizens to answer these questions. 'In order to get voters interested and involved, European political parties need to show them that they have a

range of options to choose from,' said Ms Frassoni.

EESC Group Presidents stressed the need to involve citizens. 'People do not see where Europe is headed. There is no general vision. The "Programme for Europe" now offers this vision. It shows that there is the common European interest. We need to recreate a Europe of citizens, not a

Europe of bureaucracies,' said Henri Malosse, President of the Employers' Group. 'European citizens will not turn out to vote simply because we ask them to. We need to inform them,' said Employees' Group

President Georgios Dassis. 'In the last years we have achieved much more than we did in previous centuries,' said Staffan Nilsson, President of the EESC's Various Interests Group. 'We need to keep going down that road and our "Programme for Europe" points the way for us.'

Programme for
Europe indicates how
we can make progress
in all areas where
the EU is active

Economic recovery cannot wait



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'Economic policy has taken the right steps in the right directions, but now is the time for prompt and decisive action.' A few min-

utes after EESC member Thomas Delapina presented his opinion on the European economic recovery plan to the March plenary session with these words, the Committee adopted a detailed text that calls for a strengthened and promptly implemented response to the economic crisis.

The adopted opinion supports the European Union's efforts to date, but proceeds to ask institutions and Member States to expand and immediately implement the recovery plan. The text drafted by Mr Delapina notes that 'taking on new debt should not be seen exclusively as a burden on future generations'. Instead, European leaders should view recovery spending through the lens of future competitiveness, in line with the goals of

the Lisbon strategy. In practice this would mean that all EU Member States should be allowed to 'exceed the 3 % budget deficit threshold [...] without penalty'.

At the debate EESC members united in stressing the importance of social dialogue at all levels in order to bring European economies back on their feet. 'It is paramount that civil society input is ensured in the evolution of the plan,' stressed Michael Smyth. Concluding, Georgios Dassis, Employees' Group President affirmed the spirit of the opinion: 'We are waiting for concrete action, as everything else amounts to little more than Platonic reflection.'

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EESC conference 'Everything to play for! Let's climb out of this crisis together, and opt for progress!'

On 17 March 2009, the EESC held a conference, with the participation of the European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and Commissioners Vladimír Špidla and Joaquín Almunia, on the European recovery plan and the measures introduced in Member States to renew confidence and save jobs in Europe. Fourteen presidents or secretaries-general of national economic and social councils took part at the event which followed the conference held in January entitled 'Rien ne va plus' Ways to rebuild the European social market economy', during which the EESC began to discuss different solutions to rebuild the social market economy in Europe.

EESC President Sepi welcomed the action taken by the Commission to promote the economic recovery and called for real European coordination and solidarity, which was being put to the test during the current period of crisis. He stressed that while complying with the Stability Pact, Member States should be flexible and not lose sight of the goals of the Lisbon strategy.

Commission President José Manuel Barroso pointed out that 'Europe has all the necessary tools in order to face and overcome the current crisis but it now needs to move up a gear'. He stressed that

Europe has all the necessary tools in order to face and overcome the current crisis but it now needs to move up a gear



José Manuel Barroso and Mario Sepi

the EU has to act on three different but interlinked fronts: establish more ethical rules for the financial system; stimulate the real economy while supporting future investment; concentrate on the social dimension so as to reduce the human cost of the recession. Mr Barroso underlined that the European recovery plan had only just been put into action: Europe needs 'more action and less talk!'

Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, reminded that by late 2009 unemployment was set to rise to 8.7 % across the EU. Damage control was therefore the number one priority — the reason why one of the recovery plan's goals was to protect jobs in business. 'This plan may only be a starting point, but it is the most

important plan in recent decades and is the most we can do,' he said.

Joaquín Almunia, Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, underlined that the measures taken needed to be rapid, limited in time and targeted. 'The EU needs to concentrate on three critical areas for economic recovery: repairing the financial sector, putting in place fiscal plans to stimulate the economy and softening the impact on the public and employment,' he said. Thomas Delapina, rapporteur for the EESC opinion on the European recovery plan, underlined that the European social model could help cushion the effects of the crisis. Working in concert, Henri Malosse, Georgios Dassis and Staffan Nilsson, the presidents of the Employers', Employees' and Various Interests Groups at the EESC, concluded the conference, calling for measures to re-establish confidence and more solidarity and ethical behaviour.

Cohesion policy — a way out of the crisis and beyond?

On 1 April 2009, the EESC Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO) invited Commissioner Hübner to discuss the way out of the economic crisis and the future shape of the cohesion policy. The meeting also allowed for a discussion on the recommendations for a more efficient regional policy, presented in a joint letter that EESC member Carmelo Cedrone and MEP Miroslav Mikolasik had submitted to the Commissioner.

'The European Commission has made an effort to adjust the cohesion policy to the context of crisis,' assured

It would be useful to set up a restricted working group designed to propose a far-reaching revision of the cohesion policy

Carmelo Cedrone (EESC) and Miroslav Mikolasik (EP) in a letter to Commissioner Hübner.

payments and the full use of the flexibilities provided for in the programming period 2000–06. Not only will it provide additional liquidity into the economies but it will also help to uphold the long-term orientation and goals of regional development strategies.

Carmelo Cedrone, rapporteur of the opinion on the cohesion policy strategies and programmes in the period 2007–13, together with Miroslav Mikolasik, rapporteur of the European Parliament on the same issue, reminded members of the proposals that they had jointly presented to Commissioner Hübner. They called for the creation of a restricted working group, composed of representatives of the Commission, Parliament and both Committees and charged with revising the cohesion policy.

Commissioner Hübner assured members of the full cooperation between institutions and promised to involve the Committee in the preparation of all relevant documents. The Commissioner went on to list priorities that the post-2013 cohesion policy is likely to be based on. An integrated approach to the cohesion policy is a must as challenges facing us require comprehensive and multidimensional responses, said Ms Hübner. The future policy must focus more on the territorial dimension and territorial cooperation and it needs to operate in all regions across the EU, with the poorest regions being an obvious priority.



Danuta Hübner and Krzysztof Pater

Consumers voice their concerns as the EESC celebrates the 10th anniversary of European Consumer Day



Meglena Kuneva

In his famous speech to Congress in 1962, President Kennedy argued that consumers 'are the only important group in the economy which is not effectively organised, and whose views are often not heard'. To allow for a pluralistic debate on consumer rights involving all civil society actors, on 13 March, the European Economic and Social Committee celebrated the 10th anniversary of European Consumer Day, launched at its initiative in 1999.

The key theme of the event, attended by Meglena Kuneva, Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Marianne Thyssen MEP and Karel Machotka, representing

the Czech Presidency, was 'Consumer rights'.

More than 250 representatives from consumer associations and the business sector gathered to discuss the Commission's draft directive on consumer rights that aims to improve the functioning of the business-to-consumer internal market by enhancing consumer confidence and reducing business reluctance to engage in cross-border trade.

President Mario Sepi stressed that the event was taking place in the context of the economic crisis, which made it all the more urgent to rethink our behaviour as consumers. The new model of consumption should focus more on sustainability — the guiding principle of our times. Commissioner Kuneva underlined that governments and businesses should not see consumer policy as a luxury. On the

contrary, 'it actually is part of the solution to the economic crisis, the most serious one since the 1930s'. Ms Thyssen stressed the need for more and better information on consumer rights. Consumers are not always aware of the rights they already enjoy and may not know how to exercise them. This needs to change, said Ms Thyssen.

The ensuing debate centred around three issues: distance and off-premises contracts, unfair contract terms, and consumer sales and guarantees.

Although consumer associations welcomed a number of provisions contained in the new draft directive, namely clearer and more transparent rules for contracts, they felt that, in the long run, it could worsen the situation in a number of Member States. The European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC) said that the proposal might lead to

lower consumer protection standards in certain Member States.

All participants agreed on the need for a set of clear rules on e-commerce, which could be attained through the harmonisation of EU laws on distance and off-premises contracts.

The Committee, which is currently drafting its opinion on this piece of legislation, has concerns over a number

of provisions, primarily those related to abusive clauses. Bernardo Hernández Bataller, rapporteur for consumer rights, said 'There was a risk that the directive would fail to strengthen the consumer's position'.

The conclusions of the conference will be forwarded to the EU institutions.



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European
Elections
IT'S YOUR CHOICE

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We are the 'voice of the people' — Interview with the EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering



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Hans-Gert Pöttering

Mr President, you have been a Member of the European Parliament since the first direct elections in 1979. How has the European Parliament changed since then? In what way has the last wave of enlargement changed the European Parliament?

Hans-Gert Pöttering: The development of the European Parliament (EP) since I was first elected in 1979 has been extraordinary. In terms of powers and competence the Parliament has made huge progress. Back then the EP was a consultative body with no legislative power. Today approximately 75 % of EU legislation is adopted on equal footing by MEPs and the Council of Ministers.

Once the Lisbon Treaty comes into force this volume will increase to nearly 100 %.

The last enlargement has been a huge success. As a result of this process the continent is united in peace. The not so new Member States now share the values and principles that underpin the European construction. They have brought in an enormous amount of knowledge and experience in terms of building relations with the EU's new neighbours in the east and south-east. This is value added which should not be underestimated.

How have the relations between the European Parliament and the EESC changed throughout these years?

As President of the EP I have experienced a very good working relationship with the Committee. Last year in May I had the privilege to address the 50th anniversary of your first plenary session. In the Parliament we appreciate the contribution of the EESC particularly in regard to opinions drafted by your plenary on a wide range of issues, as well as being a link between the institutions on the one hand and the civil society and business on the other. This is an important task which you are performing. This can not be stressed enough.

How could you explain a rather surprising phenomenon: the increase in the power of the EP has not been accompanied by the increase in the voter turnout rate. On the contrary, turnout declined ...

Addressing this matter we should not forget that the turnout in elections on national level, or even regional, is decreasing as well. This is a broader phenomenon than just the European elections.

In terms of the decreasing turnout in European elections there are multiple issues which contribute to this result. One is unfortunately the fact that 'Brussels', the European institutions, are considered as scape goats for many unpopular decisions taken by national governments. It is easier to say that 'Brussels wants it', rather than to patiently explain why certain decisions are taken. This later backfires in the elections. In this regard we all have a contribution to make to change this tendency.

What do you think should and what can be done to increase the participation turnout rate in the elections to the European Parliament?

It is my strong conviction that all convinced European citizens of the Member States should be fully

engaged and mobilised. Participating in the election is also showing support to this unique project of European integration. Achieving success in this regard needs to be a joint effort where we explain what the EP has done in the last five years and how this has affected the daily life of the citizens. This effort however, requires an involvement from candidates, political parties, governments and, last but not least, the media. A genuine participation of these essential players should be the key to stopping the trend of decreasing turnout in the elections.

What we have seen in the last elections is that they tend to focus primarily on domestic issues. What needs to be done to ensure that the EP elections discuss matters of European interest?

This is another tendency which needs to be changed. This should happen by involving national politicians in a debate on what the benefits of European integration have been so far for the citizens. Let me just name a few: peace, security and stability. Just imagine what would happen today if we did not have the euro.

I feel that during this election the financial and economic crisis will be an important topic discussed in all Member States. I have no doubt

that there will be a strong national angle in this debate, but I am sure there will be a European one as well. This is an issue which involves us all, and the European Union is part of the solution.

How would you describe the next EP's biggest challenge? Where do you see the European Parliament in 10 years from now?

Without doubt the biggest challenge today is completing the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. It will also influence the work of the European Parliament. Therefore I imagine that a period of consolidation will follow.

In 10 years, on the other hand, I would like to see the European Parliament as an institution with full legislative and oversight powers — one which strongly defends the interest of the citizens of the European Union. After all, we are the 'voice of the people' and promote European values and principles around the world. Last but not least, I would like the Parliament to continue to be a platform where new ideas about European policy are being introduced and hammered out.

Make your voice heard: make your vote count! by Margot Wallström

If you already know that the European Parliament elections are taking place in June this year, you are one of a small minority. According to the latest Eurobarometer survey, only 16 %

of the EU population are aware and only 28 % definitely intend to vote. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do to inform people about these elections and to explain why they matter.

Parliament has recently launched its campaign to publicise the elections and the issues currently facing EU policymakers — such as 'How should our food be grown?', 'What kind of energy do we want?' and 'How much should we tame the financial markets?'

The European Commission is actively supporting this campaign. We are using our contacts with radio and TV broadcasters to facilitate the free broadcasting of video and audio material. Our representations in the Member States are working with the EP information offices to organise local debates and other events. We are preparing the necessary information material. Women and young people are being especially targeted, as their awareness and interest appear to be particularly low. We have produced a booklet on issues of concern to women, and we are holding seminars for the editors of women's magazines. In partnership



Margot Wallström

with MTV we are running a multimedia campaign to reach out to young people, and we have launched a project called 'thinkaboutit.eu' to get young people blogging about the election issues.

But we need the help of the European Economic and Social Committee. You are best placed to explain to your members the important role of the EP. You can encourage in particular the women in your organisations to make their voices heard in June — if possi-

ble by voting for a good woman candidate. Above all, you can get people debating the issues. Few things raise awareness more effectively, or arouse more passionate interest, than a lively policy debate! It is the key to having a good turnout in June and to revitalising participatory democracy at EU level.

We have a few short weeks to make a difference for the next five years. Let's do it!

European elections: when can you vote?

The European elections will be held between 4 and 7 June 2009, in accordance with custom in the various Member States. Elections in the United Kingdom, for example, are traditionally held on a Thursday, while in other Member States they are held on a Sunday. In order to respect the different traditions — *Vive la diversité!* — the elections will be held over a four-day period.



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Thursday, 4 June 2009
Netherlands, United Kingdom

Friday, 5 June 2009
Czech Republic, Ireland

Saturday, 6 June 2009
Czech Republic, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia

Sunday, 7 June 2009
Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Bulgaria.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2009>



Everything you always wanted to know about the European Parliament but were afraid to ask ...

A — Appointment of the Commission — Before being appointed, a nominee for the post of President of the European Commission and the Members of the Commission as a body must receive a vote of approval from the EP.

B — The budget of the European Union is decided jointly by the Parliament and the Council of the European Union. The Parliament debates it in two successive readings and the budget does not come into force until it has been signed by the President of the European Parliament.

C — Co-decision is the legislative procedure introduced by the Treaty of Maastricht that strengthens the EP's powers and puts it on an equal footing with the Council of the European Union in a considerable number of policy fields ranging from the free movement of workers to environment and research. Without the consent of the EP no legislation can be adopted in those areas.

COSAC (Conference of European Community Affairs Committees) consists of representatives of EU affairs committees of national parliaments and Members of the European Parliament. They meet every six months to exchange information on the practical aspects of parliamentary scrutiny. COSAC can address to the institutions any 'contributions' that it deems necessary and examines all proposals in the field of justice and home affairs.

D — The discharge procedure enables Parliament to judge politically how the EU budget has been spent and to recommend improvements. The EP can grant, postpone or refuse discharge for the implementation of the budget. The refusal has no legal consequences but can be considered as an important political sanction. The refusal in December 1998 led to the resignation three months later of the Commission presided over by Jacques Santer.

E — The Edinburgh European Council, held in December 1992, reached an agreement on the seats of the European Parliament. Strasbourg became ultimately the official seat, with 12 plenary sessions, while other activities take place in Brussels. The General Secretariat is based in Luxembourg. 'If you want to meet an MEP at the European Parliament, you should never forget to state clearly where you are going to meet', advises the European Parliament's website.

F — Fontaine, Nicole — one of the two female Presidents of the European Parliament in its history. She presided over the institution between 1999 and 2001. The first ever female President of the Parliament was Simone Veil (1979–82).

G — Groups in the EP are coalitions of MEPs organised by political affiliation and not nationality. There are currently seven political groups in the European Parliament. Following the June 2009 elections, a group will have to have a minimum of 25 MEPs from at least seven Member States. The political groups hold regular meetings as well as seminars to determine the main principles of their activity. Several political groupings have founded political parties that operate at European level, e.g. the European People's Party, the Party of European Socialists, the European Green Party and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

I — Information offices of the European Parliament are located in all Member States. Their primary goal is to bring the public closer to the European Parliament, by informing them about its work and by facilitating communication between the public and MEPs. Amongst other activities, they answer citizens' queries, distribute publications and keep the national media informed of European Parliament news.

L — The Lisbon Treaty, once entered into force, will boost the powers of the European Parliament as regards lawmaking, the EU budget and approval of international agreements. The composition of the Parliament has also been changed — the number of MEPs is capped at 751. Seats will be distributed among countries according to 'degressive proportionality', which means that MEPs from more populous countries will each represent more people than those from smaller countries. No country may now have less than 6 or more than 96 MEPs.

M — *Matthews v United Kingdom* ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in which the Court found the UK responsible for the lack of elections to the European Parliament in Gibraltar. Ms Denise Matthews, a British citizen, and resident of Gibraltar, who was denied the possibility to express her opinion in the choice of members of the European Parliament, was awarded by the Court approximately GBP 45 000 by way of fees and expenses.

Motion of censure is a powerful political tool in the hands of the European Parliament that allows it to force the members of the Commission to resign collectively. No motion of censure has been adopted so far.

O — The Ombudsman, appointed by the Parliament, investigates cases of maladministration by the EU bodies and institutions, at the complaint of citizens. The position was established by the Maastricht Treaty and is based in Strasbourg. The current Ombudsman is Nikiforos Diamandouros.

EESC and European Parliament — working together for progress

Long and rich is the history of cooperation between the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament. In no way is this cooperation limited to the formal consultation provided for by the Treaty. It also includes more informal links and contacts at different levels that allow for the mutually enriching exchange of complementary views, ideas and expertise. Here are just two examples.



The EP makes use of the EESC's expertise

The year 2009 started well for EESC–European Parliament relations. In the first meeting of the EP's Committee for Industry, Transport, Research and Energy on 19 January the EESC presented its opinion 'Facing the oil challenge'. This document highlights the medium- and long-term conclusions for EU energy policy in response to the dire experience of the summer 2008 oil price peak.

'The fact that the European Parliament has requested the Committee to prepare this opinion is an important acknowledgement of the EESC's role in European policymaking and the result of good collaboration of the Committee with the colleagues in the Parliament.' János Tóth, president of the EESC's section for transport, energy and infrastructure welcomed the referral.

Energy policy: one challenge, different answers

By the time of the referral the EP had already started working on an own-initiative report on the same subject. The EESC therefore formed a drafting group and the rapporteur Derek Osborn managed to carry out a stakeholder consultation with representatives of the oil industry, NGOs and several Commission services and to review the drafts of the EP rapporteur.

This intensive and quick work resulted in a rather progressive paper; the EESC showing ways out

of the dependency on oil, while the EP concentrated on access to remaining oil resources. The EESC opinion states that the long-term response to the double threat of insecurity of energy supply and accelerating climate change has to be a rapidly diminishing dependence on oil, encouraged by clear financial and fiscal incentives and with the target to reduce EU oil consumption by 50 % by 2050.

This contrasts with the EP's report, which focuses more on how to ensure access to the remaining oil reserves. 'I am sure that MEPs will consider the points made by you in their debate,' Angelika Niebler, Chairwoman of the EP's ITRE committee welcomed the EESC's diverging views.

The EESC and the European Parliament working together in external relations



The collaboration with the European Parliament in external relations is an extremely fruitful one. While section members take part in delegations with third countries organised by the Parliament, chairs of the parliament committees that deal with the EU's foreign relations participate in meetings of the Commission's External Relations DG and the events it organises.

The EESC takes part as an observer, for example, in the sessions of the three EP parliamentary assemblies: the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and the EU–Latin America Joint Parliamentary Assembly. In each case, these assemblies have mandated one of their vice-presidents to liaise with civil society organisations.

The ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly — a shining example

The EESC has maintained regular contacts with the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPP) for many years. Members of the ACP–EU Follow-up Committee attend JPP sessions to tell them about their work. They also invite assembly co-presidents to take part in meetings and seminars held by the EESC for the ACP–EU economic and social stakeholders. Civil society hearings are staged to accompany ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly sessions and assembly members are actively involved in these.

Cooperation has embraced a range of areas, including monitoring negotiations on ACP–EU economic partnership agreements, regional integration and sustainable development, and evaluating implementation of the Cotonou Agreement.

An insider's guide to the European Parliament

Is there a better way to learn about an institution than talk to people who work(ed) there and thus have an insider's knowledge at their disposal? *EESC info* met the only current members of the European Economic and Social Committee who have once been MEPs to hear about their experiences.



Renate Heinisch

Renate Heinisch, a member of the Various Interests Group, representing BAGSO, the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations, was elected to the European Parliament in 1994, as a member of Germany's Christian

Democratic Union (CDU), part of the European People's Party.

You were a member of the European Parliament between 1994 and 1999 when, some commentators say, the EP confirmed its power and role, by triggering the process that led the Commission presided over by Jacques Santer to resign? Did you have the feeling that the European Parliament's influence was growing?

It is certainly true that the Parliament has gained greater power and influence, but I think that most citizens do not recognise it. One problem is that it often takes several years between decisions being taken in the EP and new laws coming into force. Citizens are aware of the concrete rights that the EU has brought them — to travel, to work, and to study all over Europe — but they are not so

well informed about the Parliament; just as they are not well informed about what their national parliament does.

Which of your reports in the European Parliament has had the most impact and why?

As a member of the EESC, I have been continuing to work on many issues that I had worked on in the Parliament. A key example is lifelong learning: my report on the European Year of Lifelong Learning (1996) emphasised the need for more opportunities for older people to learn. Since

‘Citizens are aware of the concrete rights that the EU has brought them — to travel, to work, and to study all over Europe — but they are not so well informed about the Parliament, just as they are not well informed about national parliaments’

then, the Grundtvig programme, focused on adult education, has been set up, an area in which I did

a lot of work was on public understanding of science and technology. At that time citizens were becoming more and more aware of ethical issues in research. As a pharmacist, I was particularly interested in how these affect health policy and medicines. (And I am now working on an opinion for the Committee on the Commission's proposal on patient information on pharmaceutical products).

What do you think can be done to encourage young people to turn up and vote in the elections to the European Parliament?

We need to be going into schools to explain what we do. European events for children and young people are important, as are games and information material accompanied by music from around Europe, as they can explain Europe in a fun way. Children and young people need to know that their countries are part of the EU. They should not be asking 'What is Europe?' We need to demonstrate what Europe has achieved. In my home state, Baden-Württemberg, the Parents' Association, which I chair, is working on an initiative to encourage creativity in schools, and even in *Kindergarten*. The European dimension can, as we say, 'give wings' to children.

Bryan Cassidy, a member of Group I, and a business consultant, was a Member of the European Parliament for three terms, from 1984 to 1999. He represented the county of Dorset for the UK's Conservative Party, sitting in the Group of the European People's Party.

You were an MEP for 15 years. How has the Parliament changed during that time, and since then?

The Parliament has gained power with each Treaty revision. When I was first elected, in 1984, the only real power was over the budget. Since then, the co-decision procedure has been introduced — and the Lisbon Treaty would extend its application to further policy areas — which means Parliament holds power over most EU legislation. And, in 1999, Parliamentary pressure persuaded Jacques Santer to call on his entire Commission to resign.

Changes in the Parliament haven't necessarily been for the better, though. In the UK, Tony Blair's government brought in an undemocratic form of proportional representation from the 1999 EP election. Voters now have no idea who their MEPs are, and turnout has fallen (whereas it was rising, from a low level, with the old single-member constituencies).

The EP and the EESC, each within the roles conferred on them by the Treaty, participate in the EU's law-making process. What do you see as the main qualitative difference between the input provided by the EP and that provided by the EESC?

‘When I was first elected in 1984, the only real power was over the budget. Since then, the co-decision procedure has been introduced [...] which means Parliament has power over most EU legislation’

The Committee is only 'consulted' by the other institutions, of course, but it contains a huge range of experience. There is nobody in the EESC without an outside interest, which is not the case for parliamentarians. Indeed, most of them have little detailed knowledge of the subjects on which they're voting! They tend just to follow the instructions of their party whips.

I wouldn't say that the quality of debate in the Committee is better than in the Parliament, but the quality of opinions is. That comes in part from the depth of technical knowledge that our members have on a wide range of subjects based on

their experience whether as employer (Group I), employee (Group II), or as a representative of 'other' interests (Group III)

How do you think cooperation between the EESC and the EP will develop in the future?

Now the EESC is physically closer to the Parliament, it is easier to develop contacts, but it still requires great efforts by the EESC. Our members need to cultivate contacts amongst MEPs from their own country. There is still little awareness amongst MEPs of the Committee and what it can do. However, there are some former EESC members in the Parliament now, just as there are former MEPs in the Committee. I hope there will be more when the EESC mandate is renewed next September.



Bryan Cassidy

Our rapporteurs drafting EESC opinions must develop contacts with their counterparts in the Parliament. But there is a problem with timing: the Committee has to act faster to adopt its opinions in time to be useful to the Parliament. We need to get in early, because if our opinions are only agreed after Parliament has voted on its opinion, it's too late.



Stéphane Buffetaut

Stéphane Buffetaut (Group I) is president of the Sustainable Development Observatory in the European Economic and Social Committee. He is a director of EU relations for Veolia Environnement. From 1997 to 1999, he was a Member of the European Parliament, elected from the Mouvement pour la France party, sitting in the Group of Independents for a Europe of Independent Nations.

Your time as an MEP (1997–99) coincided with several major events in the development of the EU, including the opening of accession negotiations with the

countries from central Europe, the advent of the euro and the resignation of the Santer Commission. What do you see as your achievements in the EP, and what would be your best memories of your time there?

Politically speaking, the strongest memory is the resignation of the Santer Commission in a very dramatic atmosphere. In fact it was the first time in the EU's history, and for the moment the only time, that the Commission has been politically constrained to resign.

The second memory is when I presented a report on family policies in Europe with the support of the PPE. That was the first time that this issue was the subject of a Parliament report. Now, it has become more widely discussed, due to its significance for demographic change. Some of the initiatives we put forward have been taken up, in particular in the European Alliance for Families, launched during the German Presidency in spring 2007. Of course that is one of the problems of working in the EU; that dis-

cussions take such a long time, and implementing policies can require many years.

As an MEP, you have the impression that you are helping to build the framework of a new Europe, that you can act on events. Maybe only in a small way, but you are contributing to matters of importance in Europe. This is why I intend to stand as candidate at this year's elections, this time standing for France's ruling UMP, part of the European People's Party.

Why do you think participation rates in elections to the European Parliament have steadily decreased since 1979? Do you think the trend is likely to be reversed this year, and if so why?

No, I can't see this trend changing this year. People don't know about the role and function of the

EU. They have very little knowledge of the institutions and the way they work — even people in political circles. I've been astonished at how little some MPs in France know about the EU.

Part of the problem is that MEPs are largely unknown. People vote for a list, maybe they recognise the first name on the list, but not the rest.

‘My strongest memories are the resignation of the Santer Commission in a very dramatic atmosphere and the presentation of my report on family policies in Europe’

And the constituencies are too large for the MEPs to have strong links with voters.

Also people probably feel that their vote is unimportant or ineffective. The media in France only mention Europe when there's a difficulty or a problem; they never talk about successes, which means people don't have a good impression. And of course, in France there is also the impression that the problems of globalisa-

tion are linked to the EU being 'too liberal'.

How do you expect to see cooperation between the EESC and the EP developing in the future?

I hope we'll see much more cooperation in the future. When I was an MEP, it was extremely rare for the Committee's opinions to be mentioned. But then the chair of the Legal Affairs Committee, Ana Palacio, would mention them frequently, recommending members to read them when she thought they were of high quality.

That is our strongest weapon — to produce opinions of good quality. Of course we are much more used to working with the European Commission; cooperation is much better established there. We're less used to working with the Parliament — possibly that stems from a sort of rivalry from the earliest days, when both were consultative bodies.

Continued from page 4 —
Everything you always wanted to
know about the European Parliament
but were afraid to ask ...

P — Petitions to the Parliament can be submitted on any matter of EU policy, by any citizen or resident of the European Union.

President of the European Parliament, elected for a two-and-a-half-year term, chairs the plenary session and debates, and represents the institution within the EU and internationally. The President's signature is required for bills to become EU law and for the EU budget to be adopted.

Q — Questions in written form can be submitted to the Council and the Commission, who in turn have to respond within a short period of notice. Members of the Parliament use this frequently to address an issue of complaint to the Commission or the Council.

R — The residence principle for candidates and voters ensures that all EU citizens, irrespective of nationality, have the right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament in the country in which they live.

S — Spaak, Paul-Henri (1899–1972), a Belgian politician, was the first President of the Common Assembly (1952–54), an early forerunner of the European Parliament. He played a crucial role in formulating the Treaties of Rome and is considered as one of the founding fathers of the European Union.

U — Uniform electoral procedure for the European Parliament is a non-implemented provision of the Treaty of Rome that would require all Member States to elect MEPs according to the same rules. Today, each Member State still sets its own provisions for the election procedure.

V — Visitors are welcomed by the EP to its premises in its three places of work: Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. For those visiting in groups, a simple online registration is required prior to the visit. Check at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu> if you want to visit the EP.

W — 'Louise Weiss' is the principal building of the EP that was inaugurated in 1999 and is named after the French journalist, women's rights activist and MEP. It has a surface area of 220 000 m² and is located in the Wacken district of Strasbourg.

Citizens point the way forward for the next European Parliament

EESC info asked five random people from all over Europe about the June elections to the European Parliament.



Bruno Teixeira

Bruno Teixeira, 30, works as a business consultant in the city of Porto in Portugal. He will vote in the elections to the EP as 'it is a duty of every citizen'. To bridge the yawning gap 'between voters and elected persons we have to vote, despite having a clear idea that my vote alone leads to nothing'. Turning up and casting a ballot is not solely a duty, though. It is an opportunity, since this 'is the only instrument we have in our days to try and change things. What

alternative ways do we have?' asks Mr Teixeira. In the years to come the European Parliament should help to cope with 'unemployment, environment, corruption and to establish a limit to higher wages or bonuses'.

Traditional Dutch pragmatism seems to be behind the intentions of **Gerard Jansen**, a 53-year-old lawyer from Leeuwarden in the Netherlands, to vote in the EP elections. 'The importance of the EP for the European society is increasing. European laws are influencing more and more our daily lives. As the EP is the voice of the people, it is of great importance that it be supported by the citizens of Europe and that citizens be aware of that and vote.' Cau-

tion and consciousness are the key words that Mr Jansen uses while describing how to vote. Among problems that need to be addressed, Mr Jansen names climate change, energy diversification and trade. Last but not least, participatory democracy needs to become a reality.



Gerard Jansen



Harri Haanpää

'I'll probably vote, but I don't really know much about what's happening, and at the moment I don't know who I would vote for,' says **Harri Haanpää**, 33, a film director from Helsinki in Finland. But he knows what an ideal MEP should not be like. 'If we vote for MEPs who are not talented enough, or not committed enough, they can act as a brake on development [of Europe]'. That they care wholeheartedly

about the environment is a stereotypical view of Finns. 'The big problem to be solved in the next five years is the environment,' confirms Harri. 'I'd also like to see action on the social divide: the rich always seem to get richer while the poor get poorer. It is clear that some of our problems exist now because of inequality in society.'

Did you ever wonder how the current crisis would affect the next legislature? 'It will be a very challenging time,' sums up **Alessandra Bagnato**, 35, a project manager from Genova in Italy. 'You only need to look at the newspapers to see the problems we face — people are losing their jobs and getting into financial difficulty. There are lots of issues that we need MEPs to tackle. The most important task is to find solutions to the economic crisis and to help people whose jobs are endangered. We need to make Europe more competitive too, and it is difficult

to reach a compromise in the current situation.' The crisis in the EU does not stop at borders and a pan-European answer is needed. 'MEPs come from different countries and have the right perspective needed to achieve results. If they can work together, all European citizens will then benefit.'



Alessandra Bagnato



Elias Kalapanidas

'Things will not change, if we remain passive,' eagerly states a Greek researcher from Athens, **Elias Kalapanidas** (38). 'There is always the issue of compromises to be done so as to serve the European Union, which is getting wider and wider. Somehow I sense that targeting the average European citizen is not enough, cultural differences and particularities should be respected more.' Voting is one of the most powerful tools that the citizens have in their hands to choose the direction in which the polity goes. Which direction will be the EU's for the next five years? 'It should tackle the unemployment, mainly through protecting and supporting the small and medium-sized enterprises that have the

potential to grow and absorb the unemployed,' says Mr Kalapanidas. Is the impact of the choice made at the ballot box felt in the daily life? 'There is not a direct impact,' muses Mr Kalapanidas. 'There is an impact in a wider sense. Maybe this impact is sometimes limited due to various reasons, for example the inability of national legislatures to promptly abide by EU rules.'

Have your say!

The EESC has launched its own election campaign! On a special website — with a clock counting down the time left until Election Day, the Committee brings together its members and their organisations across Europe to publicise the elections.

EESC Vice-President Irini Pari has decided it was time to join the battle, calling upon citizens to express themselves

and vote: 'You will be electing the men and women who, together with your ministers, will take the decisions affecting your everyday life, whether you are an entrepreneur or a worker, producer or consumer, young or old! We always say Europe is far away from its citizens. Well here is the opportunity to make your voice heard in Europe. Don't miss it! Have your say!'

Many people have joined the EESC, among them EP Vice-President Alejo Vidal-Quadras, who called upon citizens

to make a choice, especially in times of crisis: 'It is imperative that each citizen takes an active part in the election of the future European Parliament. Each vote counts. Do not let the others decide for you.' Check out the EESC's website:

http://eesc.europa.eu/events/2009-elections/index_en.asp



Road transport 2020: expectations and challenges ahead

On 17 March 2009, the EESC's section for transport and energy networks brought together key road transport stakeholders in order to examine their main expectations regarding road transport in 2020. Amongst the key speakers was Michael Nielsen from the International Road Transport Union (IRU), who underlined that, in order to tackle the expected growth in transport demand, the next 10 years will be vital for achieving co-modality, efficient energy usage, and improving and extending the European road network.



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Christina Tilling, representing the European Transport Federation (ETF), voiced the concerns of road transport employees regarding the improvement of working conditions, investment into training and qualification, and health and safety, in order to make the sector more attractive, safe and environmentally friendly.

For Tomáš Pavlica, representing the Czech Presidency of the Council, the future road transport system must be safe and reliable, environmentally friendly, accessible and supporting the prosperity and economic development. In highlighting the important role of the hearing, he thanked the EESC for exploring further the trends in the road transport sector. The hearing results will feed in to the preparation of an exploratory opinion on 'Road transport in 2020: the organised civil society's expectations', requested by the Czech Presidency of the Council. The summary of the hearing is available at http://eesc.europa.eu/sections/ten/index_en.asp

EESC tables 'A programme for Europe'



From left to right: Nicolas Alexopoulos, Martin Westlake and Mario Sepi

In its plenary session in March, the EESC rose to the challenge of providing concrete and thorough strategic proposals for the problems facing the European Union. In what has already been hailed as a milestone event in the Committee's history, its members adopted the 38-page document 'A programme for Europe: proposals of civil society'.

Amidst economic, social and environmental uncertainty of a kind not seen for decades in Europe, the recommendations are expected to kick-start a necessary debate on issues such as building a knowledge-based society, strengthening Europe's

industrial base, reducing CO₂ emissions and reshaping European governance.

The 'Programme for Europe' sets out a global, strategic and long-term vision for the future of Europe. It will be presented to the next Commission and Parliament and contains a number of recommendations on four topics: economic recovery, fundamental rights and the European social model, sustainable development and governance. The discussion at the plenary session revealed an extremely wide consensus among the three groups regarding the initiative undertaken by President Sepi.

'The European Union needs a new political project and that is just what we are submitting', said Henri Malosse, President of the Employers Group. Georgios Dassis, President of the Employees' Group, underscored the consensual quality of the programme. 'The concrete initiatives that it includes have been agreed by representatives of all sectors of European society'. Staffan Nilsson, President of the EESC's Various Interests' Group, stressed: 'The long-term vision contained in the document will spark a debate ahead of the European elections and may thus contribute to increasing the voter turnout rate which has recently been unacceptably low'.

European research without barriers: when and how?

How can we improve the relationship between industry, education and business? How can innovation be made to work and pay for small and medium-sized enterprises? Around 70 people tried to find answers to these questions at a public hearing on 'Research and development: in support of competitiveness', which was organised by the EESC and the Czech Presidency, in Prague on 18 March.

The Czech Presidency has asked the EESC to draw up an exploratory opinion on the ways in which research and development can support competitiveness ahead of the informal summit on competitiveness that was held in the Czech capital at the beginning of May.

Anna Maria Darmanin, EESC rapporteur on the subject, wants to ensure that pan-European innovation and research can develop without barriers. Ms Darmanin is therefore advocating the harmonisation of innovation programmes and opportunities within the EU, better information on research and innovation activities, and encouraging universities and businesses to exchange ideas more often.

There is a need to improve and speed up the process of transferring innovative ideas from universities and research centres to industry so that all sectors of the economy can benefit from innovation, according to Professor Drahos from the Academy of Sciences in the Czech Republic. As innovation is costly, the economic crisis will not make things any easier.



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PLENARY SESSION IN A NUTSHELL

Copyright in the knowledge economy

The EESC was consulted by the Commission on the proposal for a Green Paper on copyright in the knowledge economy. The purpose of the Green Paper is to debate how knowledge can best be disseminated online and to find answers to some problems relating to the role of copyright.

Comprising two parts, the Green Paper is concerned with the issue of exceptions to exclusive rights of holders of copyright and related rights; the second part dealing with specific issues related to the exceptions and limitations which are most relevant for the dissemination of knowledge and whether these exceptions should be adapted in the digital era. The conditions for digitisation and communication of works vary greatly among the Member States and are, the Committee feels, sometimes too restrictive in nature. However, it fully supports this approach which is essential for the subsequent roll-out of the Lisbon strategy.



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Equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity



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equal treatment of the self-employed and assisting spouses (self-employed individuals contributing to the activity of the family business without being either a partner or a salaried worker).

The EESC regrets that the directive does not address the lack of recognition of 'assisting spouses'. It would like the directive to put forward concrete measures to improve the social or financial standing of such women and to grant them social protection. Lastly, in accordance with this proposal, the Member States would be required to give self-employed women the opportunity to be covered by a social security system which provides for maternity leave cover.

On 24 November 2008, the Council decided to consult the EESC on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity. The Committee adopted an opinion on one of the legislative proposals, which seeks to ensure

Transatlantic relations: how to improve the participation of civil society?



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The EESC drew up an own-initiative opinion which was adopted at the plenary session of 24 and 25 March, recommending the development of transatlantic cooperation. President Obama's new administration and the financial and economic crisis will trigger a sea change in relations between the EU and the USA. New action is therefore needed to work more closely together in order, among other things, to fulfil the pledges made by the G20 summit leaders on 15 November 2008.

The EESC suggests establishing contacts with the US economic and social partners to set up advisory groups within the US administration. It believes it is vital to bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion and to prevent the creation of new barriers to trade or investments. Lastly, the Committee calls on President Obama to move swiftly to appoint a new US Co-Chair of the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) to continue through broader dialogue and beefed-up responsibilities.

For more information please consult the link: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/documents/opinions/avis_en.asp?type=en



MEMBERS' NEWS

Irimi Pari speaks at International Women's Day



Speaking at the Commissioners' Group on Fundamental Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities, in Strasbourg, EESC Vice-President Irimi Pari urged European institutions, governments and social partners, especially in the current crisis, to press on with vital measures to close the pay gap and to promote entrepreneurship amongst women.

Pari argued for a comprehensive understanding of the problem that would enable policymakers to not only legislate, but empower and support women in the choices they make in their lives. 'As for the areas requiring priority action, the Committee

would firstly point out the need to solve the gender pay gap problem,' said Pari.

Former EESC President awarded with European Medal



Former EESC President Dimitris Dimitriadis was awarded the Business Centre Club's Honorary European Medal on 3 April in a ceremony in Warsaw, Poland. The medal is awarded to persons outside the business community, whose work serves and promotes the idea of the European Union. Previous recipients of the medal include Polish politician and Auschwitz survivor Władysław Bartoszewski, former Polish PM and current MEP Jerzy Buzek, British historian Norman Davies and EU Commissioner Danuta Hübner.

EESC Design ZeroNine — European Award for a Sustainable Present

To mark the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, the European Economic and Social Committee launched, in March 2009, an international design competition in all 27 EU Member States to create, and later produce, an innovative and sustainable design product, with a strong civil society message. Students and design professionals are invited to participate in this competition and to submit their ideas by 15 August 2009.

The winning design will be officially adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee as a promotional gift for its President, Vice-Presidents and members to be used during official visits and on other selected occasions. The winning product will be produced in a limited edition in 2010 in the EU as part of the EESC's communication strategy.

More information and registration: <http://www.design-competition.eesc.europa.eu>

Launch of the book *Europe, globalisation and the Lisbon agenda* at the EESC

Maria João Rodrigues

On 25 March 2009, the European Economic and Social Committee hosted the launch of a book entitled *Europe, globalisation and the Lisbon agenda* by Ms Maria João Rodrigues and other European authors.

The discussion focused on the theme 'Crisis, globalisation and the Lisbon agenda' and was opened by EESC President Mario Sepi, who has enjoyed a strong and effective working relationship with Ms Rodrigues on this topic.

The panel of speakers taking part in the debate included, Jiří Buriánek, Direc-

tor for Competitiveness, Lisbon Strategy, Industry, Research and Information Society, at the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, and Professor Janine Goetschy, representing the Institute for European Studies (IEE-ULB).

The event provided an opportunity for many of the 'Lisbon players' to exchange views on one of the most controversial topics of the decade.

IN SHORT

Our President's blog: What can Europe do when disaster hits?



Italy was hit by a terrible earthquake at the beginning of April. According to Mario Sepi, now is the time for the European Union to mobilise its Solidarity Fund for natural catastrophes, and for applying the rapid response approach demanded by the European Economic and Social Committee when the fund was first set up. Discuss with the President at:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/organisation/president/Sepi/blog/index.asp>

Education: how to maintain employment even in times of crisis

Europe needs more engineers and scientists, more people who can handle innovation and change and more people who can understand and lead across different cultures, Vice-President Irimi Pari recently wrote on her blog, presenting a study on skills in Europe. A way to avoid further job

losses in times of crisis? Discuss with her at:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/organisation/vicepresidents/Pari/blog/index.asp>

EESC pays tribute to its first Secretary-General, Jacques Genton

In a moving ceremony, the EESC paid tribute to its first Secretary-General, the late Jacques Genton, who passed away last November. Speaking at the ceremony, his successor Martin Westlake honoured the role those pioneering secretaries-general played and the context in which they built not only the institutions' administrations but also the European public service.



Our new publication

The English version of the Committee's presentation brochure *The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society* has just been published. This is the new edition for the period 2008-10, presented with a new text and a new layout. You can download it in PDF format at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/documents/publications/index_en.asp

Other languages will follow soon.



EESC info in 22 languages: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/eescinfo/index_en.asp

EESC info

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